

Lauren Dillon
Democratic National Committee
430 S Capitol Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

January 19, 2018

National Freedom of Information Officer
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (2822T)
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Public Records Officer:

Pursuant to the Federal Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552, I request the following records in the possession of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8:

- All emails (including attachments) sent or received by any of the following EPA Region 8 employees that pertain to the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company property's designation as a Superfund site, or that otherwise mention any of the following words or phrases.

E.P.A. Employees:

- Any individual who has held the position of EPA Region 8 Administrator from September 1, 2016 to March 1, 2017, including – but not limited to – Shaun McGrath and Doug Benevento.
- Any individual who has held the position of EPA Region 8 Deputy Administrator from September 1, 2016 to March 1, 2017, including – but not limited to – Deb Thomas.
- Any individual who has held the position of Montana Superfund Unit Supervisor from September 1, 2016 to March 1, 2017, including – but not limited to – Joe Vranka.
- Robert Moler, Community Involvement Coordinator
- Mike Cirian, Remedial Project Manager

Keywords:

- CFAC
 - Columbia Falls
 - Aluminum Company
 - aluminum plant
 - Anaconda
 - Whitefish
 - Zinke
 - Techmanski
 - Comtrafo
 - Minato
 - Flathead
 - Glencore
 - Stroiazzo
- All letters sent or received by any of the aforementioned EPA Region 8 employees that mention any of the aforementioned keywords or phrases.
 - All faxes sent or received by any of the aforementioned EPA Region 8 employees that mention any of the aforementioned keywords or phrases.

My request covers September 1, 2016 to March 1, 2017.

For information about the events that would have created the records sought, I have included the article below.

I am not a commercial requester. I understand that there might be costs associated with this request. I would request a waiver of fees and ask for you to contact me by e-mail at researchinfo@dnc.org before incurring costs if this request will be in excess of \$50.

My preferred reproduction format is an electronic file e-mailed to me at researchinfo@dnc.org. If this is not possible, I request that you provide access to these records electronically via an FTP site, or mail electronic copies of the records to me on removable media, such as a CD or flash drive. If none of these delivery methods are feasible, I request that you mail paper copies of the records to me at the address provided above.

I would appreciate your communicating with me by e-mail at researchinfo@dnc.org rather than by mail or telephone, if you have questions regarding this request.

If all or any part of this request is denied, please cite the specific exemption which you believe justifies your refusal to release the information and inform me of your administrative appeal procedures available to me under the law.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Lauren Dillon

Columbia Falls Aluminum Company Property Declared a Superfund Site

Flathead Beacon
September 7, 2016
By: Dillon Tabish

The mighty aluminum plant along the Flathead River was once a critical part of Columbia Falls' industrial backbone and blue-collar identity. But now the deserted manufacturing site is the source of unresolved environmental and public health concerns, leading the federal government to initiate the nation's foremost hazardous waste cleanup program.

The Environmental Protection Agency announced Wednesday it was adding the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company property to the Superfund program's National Priorities List, designating it for critical cleanup among the nation's most contaminated sites. The CFAC property and nine others across the U.S. will be formally listed as Superfund sites on Sept. 9.

"The addition of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company site to the National Priorities List will ensure the comprehensive investigation and cleanup of contaminants and help secure future opportunities for the reuse of this prominent property along the Flathead River," stated Shaun McGrath, EPA Region 8 administrator. "EPA's action is based on a thorough review of site data and input from the local community."

The Superfund program will ensure that the property's owner, Glencore, a global commodities trading and mining giant based in Switzerland, and possibly other former owners will be held financially accountable for cleaning up any hazardous materials and addressing other environmental impacts. The program will also devote grants and other resources to the community to help spur redevelopment and revitalization at the CFAC site, according to Joe Vranka, EPA's Superfund unit supervisor in Montana.

The cleanup plan will be developed after the site investigation is completed around 2020, Vranka said.

The Superfund designation marks a new chapter for the former aluminum plant near the gateway to Glacier National Park. From its famous opening in 1955 through the boom years of the 1960s and 70s, the facility fueled this rural corner of Montana with over 1,500 jobs — almost half the population of Columbia Falls in those days — and millions of dollars in new economic investment. The plant closed in 2009, putting hundreds of employees out of work and leaving environmental and health concerns in its wake. Tests have detected contaminants, such as cyanide and fluoride, and metals, such as arsenic, chromium, lead, and selenium at the 960-acre industrial property.

Federal officials proposed adding the CFAC site to the NPL on March 26, 2015. The EPA received 77 public comments on the potential listing and a majority expressed support for the Superfund cleanup, according to public records of the submitted comments.

With high-profile Superfund sites, such as Libby, lingering in the backdrop, the potential listing has been a polarizing topic in a community grappling with how to clean up the massive industrial site on the outskirts of town.

Some community members have worried about the so-called Superfund stigma that could hurt the surrounding area's tourism and real estate industries. Libby was declared an EPA Superfund site in 2002 due to poisonous asbestos mined near the town that created an environmental disaster that is only now coming to a conclusion as community leaders try to distance the town and its reputation from their hazardous history.

Some have felt Glencore has acted in good faith in addressing the investigation and future cleanup, which could negate the need for the Superfund program.

A year ago, Glencore ended negotiations with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality over how to proceed with assessing and cleaning up the contaminated site, spurring the most outspoken support for Superfund. In November, the company was able to reach an agreement to launch a \$4 million remedial investigation into the full scope of contamination before any possible cleanup begins.

“Glencore has funded all expenses for the next two years for testing and I saw no reason to make this a Superfund site at this point,” Flathead County Commissioner Phil Mitchell said. “Until CFAC does not perform, I see no reason that this was done. They have tried to work with the community for a year and they did a good job.”

U.S. Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-Mont., has been an outspoken opponent of the Superfund designation and reaffirmed his criticism after Wednesday’s announcement.

“I grew up in the Flathead. I know how vibrant the Columbia Falls community and economy can be. EPA bureaucracy in Washington, D.C., is betting against Columbia Falls and taking away our local control,” said Zinke. “I stand with county commissioners who say we need to hold the company accountable but we also need to retain our right to do what we see is fit for the land. Once communities are put on the National Priorities List as a Superfund site, they rarely come off. That stigma remains. It draws down property values and hinders investment and future economic development. For a community that just lost 100 timber jobs, I don’t think that’s something we can afford. I’m very disappointed in the EPA’s decision and will be working with community leaders to figure out ways to revitalize the area and bring jobs back to the Flathead.”

Others have said the Superfund designation would ensure the proper cleanup of the property by Glencore. Concerns have also been raised about the Swiss firm and its reputation around the world for failing to voluntarily complete hazardous cleanups.

“In light of Glencore and what they’ve done around the world with other closed facilities, I’ll go with the EPA, whether you like them or not,” Mike Shepard, a Columbia Falls city councilor and former employee at CFAC, said. “I think this is the way that we will at least ensure that it’s cleaned up. This will be holding somebody’s feet to the fire ... At least now we have a direction, and that’s what we’ve been waiting for for almost seven years.”

U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., has criticized Glencore in the past for failing to properly address CFAC’s contamination. Tester applauded the EPA’s decision on Wednesday.

“Glencore can no longer try and turn their back on families in Columbia Falls,” Tester stated. “This decision guarantees that after seven years of broken promises and stonewalling, Glencore will finally be held accountable for the cleanup of CFAC. Today is a step in the right direction and I will continue to work with folks in Columbia Falls so we can strengthen the local economy, revitalize this site, and create jobs.”

The Superfund cleanup process will ensure Glencore is held financially responsible for the cleanup and help return the site to a productive and safe state for future economic development and recreational opportunities, Tester said.

Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, a Democrat, expressed his support of the Superfund designation.

“Montanans expect all companies that do business here to be good neighbors and to never leave any community in the lurch with a dangerous mess to clean up,” Bullock said in a statement. “This decision will go a long way in holding Glencore accountable to all folks and businesses in Columbia Falls as we continue to look for ways to create new, good-paying jobs and economic opportunities in the Flathead.”

The Superfund listing has been endorsed by the Columbia Falls City Council, Flathead Basin Commission and Glacier National Park.

John Stroiazzo, CFAC’s project manager, told the Beacon that the company had not yet reviewed the EPA’s decision.

“We’re obviously disappointed that we are being listed (a Superfund site). We thought there were other alternatives to listing that we discussed with the EPA,” Stroiazzo said. “We’re going to continue to work with EPA and the community. That’s always been our goal. We’ve been working hard at addressing issues at the site. We have a remedial investigation study on the go. We had quite a large, extensive monitoring and drilling program that we

conducted this summer and we are going to continue sampling at the site.”

Stroiazzo said the company negotiated with the EPA for the Superfund Alternative Process, which uses the same investigation and cleanup process and standards that are used for sites listed on the NPL.

CFAC believes that if the site had been addressed under the alternative process it would have enhanced the opportunities to redevelop the site in a much faster timeframe and allow it to contribute to the local economy, Stroiazzo said.

U.S. Senator Steve Daines, R-Mont., said, “This needed to be a community-led decision. I will maintain vigorous oversight of the EPA on this project.”

The Columbia Falls Chamber of Commerce will be holding a public presentation about CFAC and the Superfund listing on Oct. 11, according to Executive Director Stacey Schnebel. The presentation will start at 12 p.m. at the Tea Kettle Community Room and is free and open to the public.

“The Chamber acknowledges that this has been in the works for quite some time and it’s important to bring information about it to our members and our community,” she said.

Concerns are centered on possible ecological hazards lingering throughout the property and potentially leaching into the ground and surface waters or even the nearby Flathead River, which flows south to Flathead Lake and is a keystone water source.

For industrial developments in the pre-EPA era, environmental regulations were loose and consideration for impacts to ecological sources, such as a major river like the Flathead, was mostly disregarded. The harmful effects of sources such as asbestos, widely used in construction projects for decades, were also unknown at the time.

Spent pot liners containing hazardous materials were stored in unlined repositories as early as 1955, according to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. In 1980, the site was registered as a “large quantity hazardous waste generator and transporter.” Four years later, officials from the Montana Department of Health and Sciences conducted a preliminary site assessment that found further evidence that the plant was generating hazardous waste. In 1989, the site was placed on the DEQ Hazardous Waste Program list, and in 1993 the DEQ required a groundwater investigation to determine sources of cyanide in the Flathead River.

Sediment samples collected from the Flathead River and surface water samples collected from Cedar Creek, which runs below ground through the CFAC site and downtown Columbia Falls before surfacing south of town, show the two water bodies have received contaminants, including metals, and cyanide.

The EPA does not have any data indicating the city’s water supply is affected. The agency sampled residential wells near CFAC on three occasions and initially found contaminants. During the first round of sampling in 2013, cyanide was detected in two wells, although the concentrations were below the agency’s recommended level. Further sampling of 30 other wells over the following year determined there was no further cyanide or other contaminants above risk-based benchmarks.

An on-site assessment detected various metals, cyanide and fluoride in groundwater down gradient from three source areas. These contaminants were found at levels above allowable limits established through the Safe Drinking Water Act.

The current investigation process is expected to take four to five years, starting with initial surveying in April followed by the drilling of 43 sampling wells from May through September, according to CFAC officials. Groundwater sampling began this fall.

The remedial investigation will help determine the condition of the landfills, and determine whether any contaminants have spread off the property.

The Harvey Machine Company first acquired options for an aluminum plant in the Flathead Valley in 1949. Original plans were to build the plant along Rose Crossing in Kalispell. Instead the property near the base of Teakettle Mountain, with its proximity to Hungry Horse Dam, was deemed better.

On Nov. 6, 1951, Anaconda Copper Mining Company acquired 95 percent of Harvey's interests, and on Aug. 30, 1952, Anaconda announced that it would build its \$65 million aluminum reduction plant, equivalent to \$580 million today after adjusting for inflation.

Two years and 11 months later, the first aluminum was produced on Aug. 12, 1955. At its pinnacle, the plant could produce 360 million pounds of aluminum per year.

In 1976, Anaconda purchased Sumitomo Process Technology to improve plant safety, industrial hygiene and production efficiency; the conversion cost \$42 million.

On Jan. 12, 1977, Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) purchased the Anaconda Company. In December of 1983, ARCO announced intentions to divest its metals division — the brass and aluminum operations — including the Columbia Falls plant. In September of 1985, ARCO announced that the plant had been sold to the Montana Aluminum Investors Corporation, which would operate it as the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company.

On May 28, 1999, Glencore AG purchased CFAC. The company closed the site in 2009, citing market factors. In March 2015, the company announced the plant was permanently closed, leading community members to raise questions about the fate of the large industrial site.

Earlier this year, the massive plant began fading from the landscape as demolition crews razed the buildings and other above-ground facilities.